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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the ways in which nonparental significant adults affect adolescents' lives. Section 1 provides an overview of the literature regarding nonparental adults and their impact on adolescents. The concentration is on role models and significant adults. Section 2 explores the shift in developmental theory to an interactionist perspective. This paradigmatic shift is viewed as having important implications for understanding the contribution of the relationships between adolescents and nonparental adults to cognitive development. Topics addressed include social relationships and cognitve development; the evolution of a social interpretation of cognitive development; theories of Piaget and Bandura; Vygotsky and the social construction of knowledge; socio-cognitive conflict in cognitive development; and the influence of peers versus adults. Section 3 addresses such critical issues as expansion of the research agenda; the adolescent as researcher; formal and informal learning; and significant adults who influence adolescents negatively. Over 50 references are cited. (RH)

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Social Relationships Beyond Parents and Peers: The Role of Nonparental Adults in Adolescents' Lives: A Symposium

Nonparental Significant Adults in Adolescents' Lives: Literature Overview, Theory, and Issues

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Abstract

The first section of this paper will provide an overview of the literature regarding nonparental adults and their impact on adolescents. The second section will explore a recent shift in the perspective of some developmental theorists from a focus on the individual to a focus on interactions between individuals. This paradigmatic shift has important implications for understanding the significance of adolescent and nonparental adult relationships. The third section will address some of the critical issues surrounding the study of nonparental adults as they impact adolescents. A connection will be made regarding the importance of social relationships for adolescent cognitive development.

Nonparental Significant Adults in Adolescents' Lives: Literature Overview, Theory, and Issues

Introduction

The research literature regarding significant adults' influence on the development of adolescents has generally focused on the influence of parents and peers. Although the impact of parents and peers is important, recent societal changes provide reasons why the impact of nonrelated and related nonparental adults should be studied more closely. One major reason for addressing this topic is that the single parent family has become the fastest growing family configuration in contemporary society. The assumption can no longer be made that adolescents will grow up in a traditional family setting where the influence of both parents is consistently at work. Therefore, more information regarding the role of nonparental adults in youths' development is needed. How nonparental significant adults, particularly nonrelated significant adults, affect adolescents' lives is not well understood.

A second reason relates to an increased understanding regarding the connection between social relationships and cognitive development. It is important to clarify how various others influence the social construction of knowledge in order to understand the learning process better. Since adolescents spend much time interacting with nonparental significant adults, knowledge about the role of these important others in the intellectual development of youths would be useful.

The first section of this paper will provide an overview of the literature regarding nonparental adults and their impact on adolescents. The second section will explore a recent shift in the perspective of some developmental theorists from a focus on the individual to a focus on interactions between individuals. This paradigmatic shift has important implications for understanding the significance of adolescent and nonparental adult relationships particularly as the relationships may contribute to cognitive development. The third section will address critical issues surrounding the study of nonparental adults as they impact adolescents.

The Influence of Nonparental Significant Adults

Sources of relevant data found in the literature fall into a variety of categories such as: role models, significant adults, reference groups, social networks, and social landscapes. Oftentimes, the data from these categories overlap. This paper will be limited primarily to two sources of information regarding important nonparental adults, the literature about role models and the literature specifically focusing on significant adults. Even these data are not extensive, but nevertheless, provide a beginning picture of who these important adults are as well as data on their characteristics.

Role Models

According to proponents of social learning theory (Bandura, 1977, 1986; Rosenthal & Zimmerman, 1972, 1978), the effects of modeling have a considerable impact on the development of the person being influenced. Bandura (1986) views modeling as a form of reciprocal determinism in which there is a vicarious interaction of the perceiver

with the model resulting in modeling stimuli which are processed cognitively and result in the acquisition of selected behaviors.

Influence on career decisions. Stake and Noonan (1985) noted that having a same-sex role model influenced college students' educational and career development, particularly for women. When compared to men, women showed greater increases in confidence and motivation scores when the women had a same-sex role model. These same-sex role models appeared to have more personal relevance to the students than opposite-sex role models. These results reinforce Stake and Granger's (1978) earlier findings.

Teachers as role models. Fielstra (1955), for example, found that having an influential teacher in the past was ranked as one of the three most important reasons for becoming a teacher; the influence of friends and relatives was also stated as being important. Based on a survey questionnaire using a putative list of characteristics, Bergsma and Chu (1981) discovered that the influence of teachers was fairly important in senior university education students' decisions to become teachers. Senior secondary education students rated the influence of past teachers more than senior elementary education students who seemed to decide to become teachers based on their liking of children. Wood (1978) determined that present day students who chose to become teachers appeared more likely to be influenced by past teachers than students from the previous generation.

Significant Adults

In general, significant adults are often identified as having played a special role in the personal development of youths. A significant other has been defined by Stryker (1967) as follows:

> This concept [significant others] represents the recognition that, in a fragmented and differentiated world, not all the persons with whom one interacts have identical or even compatible perspectives, and that, therefore, in order for action to proceed, the individual must give greater weight or priority to the perspectives of certain others. To speak then, of significant others is to say that given others occupy hign rank on an "importance continuum for a given individual." (p.377)

Galbo (1986) has compiled a synthesis of the research literature focusing on adolescents' perceptions of significant adults. The most important significant adults are generally parents who comprise half of the related significant adults. Parents are also perceived by adolescents to be the most influential persons in youths' lives especially with regard to occupational and educational aspirations (Haller & Woelfel, 1972; Olsen, 1971) although this influence is often situational (Shade, 1978; Solomon, 1961). Other researchers have found evidence to the contrary (Alexander & Pallas, 1983; Shade, 1978) which suggests that parents do not always influence adolescents to the extent that is commonly assumed. Curtis (1974) determined that the influence of these adults tends to be stronger during early adolescence, and then decreases with time. Montemayor and Van

Komen (1980) add that, in general, the frequency of contact with adults also decreases as the adolescent becomes older.

Nonparental significant adults. The data are less clear regarding the extent to which other related and nonrelated nonparental adults influence adolescents' decisions. The range of related significant adults includes categories such as: grandfather, grandmother, aunts, uncles, and adult siblings. No specific patterns appear to exist as to which related adults are usually selected as the most important. Grandparents may play a special role in youths' lives, but the data are inconclusive. See Figure 1.

Approximately half of the adults chosen as important are not related to the adolescents (Blyth et al., 1982; Galbo, 1989a; Galbo, 1989b; Garbarino, Burston, Raber, Russell, & Crouter, 1978; Montemayor & Van Komen, 1980). These nonrelated significant adults include, but are not limited to, teachers, parents' friends, friends' parents, clergy, neighbors, and coaches (see figure 1). Nonrelated significant adults appear to play an important role in the development of adolescents particularly when familial ties are not strong. Usually, nonrelated adults are discussed in the context of providing emotional and psychological support to adolescents rather than the relationship contributing to intellectual development except in the case of nonrelated significant adults found in the school setting such as teachers.

Insert Figure 1 about here.

The role of the teacher as a significant adult has received some attention. Based on a selected review of the literature by Galbo (in press), teachers are seldom found to be especially significant for a large portion of adolescents (approximately ten percent of all significant adults). The exception seems to be youths who have had successful K-12 school experiences (Galbo, 1989b). Also, adolescents who do not identify their present teachers as significant adults are able to recall important teachers from the past (Galbo, 1983). The characteristics of significant teachers which are preferred by adolescents include qualities often associated with close friends such as trust, honesty, high expectations, and caring (Galbo,1989a, 1989b, in press).

Summary

In general, parents continue to be the primary significant adults in adolescents' lives. Nonparental related and nonrelated adults also are important to youths in ways that vary according to the situation without the predominance of any adult category with the exception, perhaps, of teachers and grandparents. Nonrelated significant adults tend to be selected along gender and ethnicity lines similar to those of the adolescent. Teachers comprise a large portion of the nonrelated adults particularly for youths who go on to college (Galbo,1989b), but are not as significant to other youths (Galbo, in press). Female adolescents choose significant adults who "accept them as themselves" while male adolescents prefer adults who "have similar interests and do things together" with the youths. Due to the limited amount of data available, these generalizations should not be viewed as conclusive.

Models of Cognitive Development

In western culture the development of the individual is seen as being multifaceted. The person is usually viewed as a composite of social, emotional, physical, as well as cognitive dimensions. Each piece is generally scrutinized separately. A synthesis of views is not a common occurrence especially when the perspective appears to violate the accepted parameters of another discipline. For example, behaviorists may not readily accept a perspective which entertains the importance of free will. Until recently, a social explanation of how cognition, intellect, or academic ability develops has not been part of the social science mainstream except in theory (Bandura, 1977; Dewey, 1916/1966, 1938/1963; Mead, 1934; Piaget, 1932/65; Sullivan, 1953).

The work of these pioneers has been expanded by others (Doise & Mugny, 1984; Hinde, Perret-Clermont, & Stevenson-Hinde, 1985; Perret-Clermont, 1980). What this relatively new perspective has provided is an extension of the present understanding of how human development is fostered particularly with regard to cognitive development. Giving increased attention to the social construction of knowledge has the potential of adding substantially to our understanding of the importance of the relationship between persons, in general, and between nonparental adults and adolescents in particular. The largest portion of the research regarding the influence of adults on youths' development focuses on children who are preadolescent. The adolescent stage, by comparison, remains largely unstudied.

There is an interest on the part of these contemporary researchers to synthesize the individual and social sides of existence. In other words, instead of focusing on the individual interacting with his/her environment, the focus becomes the study of the interactions of individuals with each other about the environment. We are only beginning to learn how these processes work in children and know even less about how they function in adolescence. The work of Vygotsky (1934/1962, 1978) has been identified as being particularly salient in providing a theoretical basis for recent researchers.

Social Relationships and Cognitive Development

Understanding the importance of the connection between social relationships and cognitive development is critical for understanding the importance of nonparental significant adults. In the past the role of nonparental adults was usually seen as contributing to the social and psychological development of youths. Although these are important dimensions in the lives of youths, the social and psychological are not often seen as direct contributors to the intellectual capacities of adolescents. Past programs were often described as humanistic and directed toward the affective side of development.

In the United States there is much concern about the ability of children to demonstrate high levels of academic achievement. Programs which provide social and emotional support are viewed as important, but not usually as important as programs designed to improve academic abilities. The social and cognitive domains are not often viewed as being related, and cognitive dimensions are not often assessed in programs that have been developed to increase social and emotional aspects. If a strong connection

between the two could be substantiated, these programs might gain more credibility which would provide additional support for their existence. Therefore, the importance of the relationship between adolescents and cognitive development takes on new meaning and significance.

An Historical Perspective

Youniss (1983) provides a description regarding the evolution of a social interpretation of cognitive development. Although the idea that social relationships influence cognitive development has been around for many years, he states that theorists and researchers have generally ignored synthesizing the individual and social sides of existence. Until the early 1970s, children's cognitive development has been studied within the context of nonsocial settings where the focus is on the individual or the interaction between the individual and the environment. Social existence and social processes are explained through functions which are seen as residing in the individual. Within this school of thought, which is still quite prevalent, the individual is viewed as a self-contained organism around which all external stimuli move.

During the 1970s a greater interest in a social interpretation of cognition developed which purported that the individual is influenced by the social conventions evident in a given culture. The conventions are usually modeled by the elders of the society which, in turn, have an impact on others. The socialization which occurs takes into account the impact of others, but in a relatively impersonal, removed manner. As the social model evolves further, the impact of others as a result of role taking becomes a prominent view. The effect of role models is a result of perceptions developed out of vicarious experiences while watching the model. The individual still remains central to this school of thought. A short critique follows of two prominent researchers who wrote about the importance of the social, but according to some current scholars, did not go far enough in their research to study how social factors influence cognitive development. See Figure 2.

Insert Figure 2 about here.

Piaget. Piaget's theories represent one dominant perspective regarding the principles underlying the development of cognition in humans. Piaget believed that biological factors within the individual are best suited to explain the growth of intelligence. Social existence and social processes are explained through functions which are seen as residing in the individual. Within this popular school of thought the individual is viewed as a self-contained organism around which all external stimuli move. Piaget (1932/1965, 1972) often discusses the importance of social factors, but according to Damon (1983), his actual research interests focus on the ways in which "...the subject, through active manipulations of the world, reorganizes its own thinking as it discovers new, unsuspected features of reality" (p.130). This subject/object dichotomy creates a closed system which suggests that objects exist outside of one's consciousness within which there is some inherent meaning waiting to be grasped. In effect, the subject remains isolated from the social context. Piaget's perspective is viewed as limiting because in his experiments he did not adequately explore the effects of the social environment on his subjects.

Bandura. Another influential figure who adds a piece to the puzzle about the relationship of the social to the cognitive is Bandura (1977, 1986). Social learning theory according to Bandura demonstrates the importance of modeling in order to understand the connection between social relationships and cognition. Bandura sees modeling theory as a form of reciprocal determinism in which there is a vicarious interaction of the perceiver with the model which can influence cognitive development. In the work of Rosenthal and Zimmerman (1972, 1978) the effects of modeling were found to be primarily responsible for the learning of abstract knowledge. These findings have been questioned. The critics indicate that modeling can be important, but the theory does not seem to explain why some people are able to learn from mistakes which are modeled as readily as from correct examples of modeling behavior. Modeling also does not adequately explain why novel behaviors appear (Hinde et al., 1985).

The Social Construction of Knowledge

Vygotsky. Most recently the work of Vygotsky (1934/1962, 1978) has begun to receive attention among researchers, because his theories regarding the social nature of the intellect appear to describe the role of interpersonal relationships in a way which some contemporary scholars find useful. One concept in particular that has received attention is the zone of proximal development (ZPD).

The zone of proximal development is defined by Vygotsky (1978) as:

> ...the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers. (p. 86)

Vygotsky's concept focuses on the aspect of development where the child has partially mastered a task or topic, but requires the assistance of an adult or capable peer to proceed further. Vygotsky believes that understanding cognitive processes requires understanding how children internalize the culture through their interactions with more experienced members of the society. The ZPD depends on the level of the child's actual cognitive functioning and the level of functioning while participating in social interaction. These two levels provide the boundaries of ZPD. What a child can do while working with an adult is an indication of the ZPD. The instruction which ensues must be directed toward the potential of the child, not toward what the child already knows. Instruction must proceed ahead of development (Rogoff & Wertsch,1984).

Understanding the connection between social relationships, cognitive development, significant adults, and adolescents is critical. What is suggested here is not the typical connection where adults provide guidance, support, and other affective and psychological benefits to young people as a result of social relationships. The connection to be made is between social relationships, in this case specifically between adults and adolescents, and cognitive development. Adults appear to serve a different function in society with regard to adolescents than do peers.

Through relationships with adults the knowledge of the culture becomes validated. Adults in relationship with youths often in informal settings provide a means for assimilating the values and beliefs of the society. These experiences provide the bases for future experiences which provides the stimulation for cognitive growth. The formal knowledge of the culture is embodied in the school curriculum where a student's success is often dependent on the extent of prior experiences in order to be able to do the work demanded in school. Specifically, how the social relationship contributes to the development of intellect is not well understood, but if a strong case can be made to show that the relationship between a young person and an adult is directly connected to intellectual growth, the value of social relationships with others will take on a new and more significant meaning. (See Galbo, 1988, for a beginning literature review on this topic which suggests there is considerable research evidence to demonstrate a strong connection between social relationships and cognitive development.) A brief discussion of one part of the existing research follows.

Extending the traditional paradigm. Several researchers (Attili, 1985; Damon, 1984; Doise & Mugny, 1983; Doise, Mugny, & Perret-Clermont, 1975, 1976; Hinde et al., 1985; Krappmann, 1985; Perret-Clermont, 1980; Rutter, 1985) have adopted the position that cognitive development is primarily a social phenomenon. These researchers view cognitive development differently from earlier social learning theorists with regard to the degree to which they believe all cognition, including intellectual development, is fundamentally social in origin. Their perspective asserts that no learning occurs in a social vacuum. Doise and Mackie (1981) state:

> ...that cognitive development results not only from a simple interaction between the child and the physical environment, but more importantly from the active reconstruction of cognition which takes place in interactions between the child and other active social beings. Cognitive structures are developed first between individuals and only later become characteristic of the individual child. (p. 63)

Socio-cognitive conflict in cognitive development. Socio-cognitive conflict within social relationships has been shown to play a central role in the mental development of children and is not simply the consequence of imitation (Bearison, 1982; Bell, Grossen, & Perret-Clermont, 1985; Doise & Mugny, 1984; Hinde et al., 1985; Mugny, DePaolis, & Carugati, 1984; Perret-Clermont, 1980, Perret-Clermont & Brossard, 1985). Bearison states that this conflict does not occur in isolation, "Cognitive conflict does not occur as a singular perturbation that suddenly disrupts the cognitive equilibrium of a thinker in solitary reflection" (1982, p. 215). Instead the conflict depends on the intercession of one or more others. The conflict provides the impetus for mental restructuring. Those students who do not have the opportunity to take into account other's viewpoints do not progress as rapidly (Perret-Clermont, 1980; Perret-Clermont & Brossard, 1985). It appears that cooperative problem solving is not adequate to bring about the desired changes and not all children benefit equally from the conflict (Bell et al., 1985).

The conflict needs to be strong in order to create a disequilibrium among the partners. Care needs to be taken so that the conflict is directed at the task and does not become a negative factor which is taken personally by the students. The disequilibrium can

arise in several ways. Children at different cognitive levels involved in solving a problem can disagree regarding possible solutions. Partners at similar cognitive levels may reach different conclusions. Models who are more cognitively advanced such as the teacher can question proposed solutions. Only when the learning partners give different answers do the partners progress. The result is that a child who seriously considers another point of view will make progress (Doise, 1985).

The influence of peers versus adults. Although some researchers have found that young children seem to learn more in groups of peers as opposed to groups in which adults are present (Damon, 1984; Damon & Killen, 1982; Perret-Clermont, 1980, Perret-Clermont & Brossard, 1985), Doise and Mugny (1984) notice similar patterns of growth in the various sample group configurations including those groups containing adults. Generally, their research shows that children can do some tasks together that they can not do alone. Wertsch (1978) suggests that a caregiver with a long standing relationship with a child would be more effective than a casual acquaintance in tuning his or her discourse to the child's abilities. Forman and Cazden (1985) concluded from their research that even though human experience needs to be grounded in adult-child interactions, the school setting imposes serious limitations for adult-child interactions. Therefore, peer relationships can function as "intermediate transforming contexts" for children in the school. Also, peer relationships are of a different order than relationships with adults. Peer interactions in classroom assignments allow children to try out behaviors like giving directions with other children whereas children seldom give directions to adults.

Summary

The evolution of theories about human development contribute useful pieces to a complicated puzzle for understanding the connection between social relationships with adults and cognitive development in adolescents. Social explanations of human development previously existed, but these theories have generally been limited to explaining social and emotional development. Theories which suggested a social interpretation of cognitive development were not seriously addressed in the research literature. Recently, a renewed emphasis to learn how knowledge is socially construction has instigated new research endeavors which have the potential to extend present understanding of existing learning theory along with a better understanding of the importance of social relationships for the intellectual development of all persons, youths in particular. Further substantiation of these social learning theories would have important implications for policies and practices addressing adolescents' needs.

Issues

A variety of important issues need attention. These issues range from the need to understand the social world of the adolescent more thoroughly to the need to understand the ways in which the relationship between adults and youths may contribute to various dimensions of adolescents' development. Although some inroads have been made regarding our understanding, in general, there is a lack of relevant data available. At this point in time researchers are only beginning to realize what are the central issues or important questions worth asking.

Expanding the Research Agenda

Intergenerational programs have traditionally been developed to assist the psychological and social development of the participants. Cognitive development tends to be overlooked. The research agenda looking at the connections between social relationships and cognitive development is relatively recent and not clearly defined. By focusing on the cognitive and intellectual outcomes of intergenerational programs, more can be learned about the role of the social in the development of cognition. One can speculate about the reasons that a cognitive focus has not been strongly evident in the past, but an inclusion of a cognitive focus would likely extend our understanding of the full contribution of these programs.

One reason may be that previous researchers have not thought that pursuing such a connection would be fruitful. Specialization in the social sciences directed researchers toward narrower topics like social cognition. Perhaps the more fundamental reason has to do with a perspective of how humans develop which tends to focus on internal or external influences or vicarious interaction. The dynamics of social relationships are very complex, and the methodology to study such complexity is not yet very sophisticated.

The adolescent as researcher. Another dimension of research which tends to be overlooked is the role of the subject as researcher. Research questions are being developed in ways in which the perspective of youths may not be adequately taken into account. The perspectives of youths are important in order to clarify which may be the best research questions to ask as well as which practices may be the most effective. Traditional research and practice tends to decide what questions are worth asking and what programs are worth implementing, but the input of youths as participants in the process may provide for further insights into the importance of nonparental adults in ways not previously addressed. Perhaps, one reason programs for adolescents have not been very successful is related to the minimal extent to which youths have been part of the process in developing them. An important consideration which needs to be addressed is to what extent the role of society should be to "do for youths" (provide) or to develop a way for adolescents to participate in a process where they learn to "do for themselves" (enable) with guidance from others such as nonparental significant adults.

Social Relationships, Cognitive Development, and Significant Adults

The important role of social relationships in the development of children is seldom disputed. What is not well understood is the role of these relationships in the cognitive development of children and adolescents. Recent emphasis on understanding the connection between social relationships and cognitive development may help to expand our understanding of the learning process in all people. If a certain amount of contact with important adults is critical for the healthy intellectual development of youths, then the implications for social and educational policies are potentially great. Two areas in particular might bear useful information through research. The first addresses the quality and characteristics of the relationship between significant adults and youths. For example, in what way does the intimacy of a relationship influence the impact of that relationship on aspects of adolescent development. Secondly, what is

the role of informal learning such as occurs in play and on recreational outings in the development of the preconditions necessary for successful experiences for youths in the more formal, academic learning associated with school.

The quality of the relationship. The quality of the relationship in which nonrelated significant adults contribute to adolescent development is likely to be similar in fashion to the quality of the relationship with parents, especially when the relationship with the nonrelated adult approaches the degree of intimacy found in families. When nonrelated significant adults are viewed as close friends or family members by adolescents, the impact on youths appears to be greater. Besides the degree of intimacy, other characteristics may be of critical importance to the development of adolescents and might be successfully incorporated into programs dealing with the needs of youths. Characteristics of adults such as challenging or having high expectations, being available, loving, trusting, all are identified by youths as being of considerable importance to their identifying an adult as significant. Additional clarity with regard to important characteristics of significant adults would paint a useful portrait of what makes a difference to youths. Further study of these qualities would increase our understanding of how these characteristics contribute to development, in general, and cognitive development, in particular.

In addition, much more needs to be understood regarding the nature of the influence significant adults appear to have on adolescents. How and when the influence functions needs additional clarification. There appears to be a situational aspect in which influence is affected by the circumstances. In other words, parents may influence a child under one set of circumstances and not another. The water is even more muddied with regard to nonparental significant adults in general and nonrelated significant adults in particular. How these others come to play an important role in the lives of youths needs further study in order to make informed decisions about programs and policies intended to enhance youths' development.

Formal and informal learning. Understanding the difference between formal and informal relationships and structures would also likely provide useful information. Significant learnings may result from informal interactions which are different than more formal relationships. In fact, informal relationships and learning may be a necessary precondition for more formal processes such as the more formal social relationships of the workplace and the more formal cognitive processes associated with school . For example, teaching a baby to talk is usually done informally within the context of a family rather than through formally structured activities. Language as well as other important skills are learned as a result of time spent "doing together" which might be another way of saying that the experience of the older is shared informally with the younger which results in learning and provides the bases for advancing to more formal and more sophisticated learning.

Negative Significant Adults

The research literature tends to assume that significant adults are those adults who have primarily a positive influence on adolescents. The exceptions, which are seldom discussed, are those experiences in which a behavior by an adult which is perceived by a young person as "negative" has a strong positive or negative outcome for the young person. Significant learnings can result from mistakes made by adolescents which are responded to by adults in ways perceived as punitive by youths. A coach who drops a student from an athletic team or a teacher who fails a student who is not working up to par can be a significant long term learning experience for a young person. How these "negative" experiences influence a young person, particularly when initiated by an important adult, would be useful knowledge.

Program Configuration

The goals and objectives of programs which are developed where adults and youths come together need to be easily grasped by participants as well as researchers. Program configurations which are too radically different from existing structures may be viewed with suspicion. The reason this is an important factor is that the participants in these programs bring their own set of expectations to the setting. If the situation is too far out of their experience, the adjustment to the program interferes with the potential of the program to provide assistance. For example, when a classroom teacher uses a new approach such as letting students decide what is to be learned, the students can be so unfamiliar with the process that much time must be spent adjusting to the situation which often detracts from the actual content to be learned and may, in fact, make it nearly impossible to proceed. One way to utilize structures existing in the society is to use models of programs with which the society already has experience such as volunteer service programs or other types of intergenerational programs that have looked promising. New methods can evolve out of existing programs which change as a result of their experiences.

An International Perspective

An international perspective provides balance and additional insights into the work being done on this topic. These exchanges of ideas need to continue and to be expanded.

Conclusion

As the social structure of society changes, the role of nonparental adults appears to have a considerable potential impact. Yet, the body of knowledge addressing adolescents and significant adults is in its infancy. Besides understanding who these important adults are in adolescents' lives, another important step needs to be taken to learn more about the nature of the influence of these important others and the effects of the quality of the relationship between adults and youths. The recent attention given to the importance of social relationships in cognitive development provides additional impetus for further study in this area. As the connection between the social and the cognitive becomes clearer, the potential implications for rearing and schooling adolescents become more profound.

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Figure 1

THE SOCIAL NETWORK OF SIGNIFICANT ADULTS FOR ADOLESCENTS

Parents

Related Significant Adults

Adult siblings
Aunts/uncles
Cousins
Grandparents
In-laws

Nonparental Significant Adults

Nonrelated Significant Adults

Teachers
Coaches
Counselors
Parent's friends
Friend's parents
Persons with religious affiliation
    Clergy
    Youth ministers
Neighbors
Service agency persons

Figure 2

MODELS OF COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT